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06/18/2019

## ICE awards new contract for rapid DNA testing at southwest border, expands pilot program

WASHINGTON – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) awarded Friday a 10-month contract for technical equipment and supplies to continue identifying fraudulent familial relationship claims made by individuals entering or attempting to enter the United States using rapid DNA testing.

The agency issued a firm-fixed-price contract to Bode Cellmark Forensics Inc., with a total value of \$5.2 million. The indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract will provide ICE with an indefinite quantity of supplies and services until the procurement effort concludes next April.

“Our goal with rapid DNA testing remains twofold. First, to protect children from being smuggled across the border by ensuring they are with their parents and not being used as pawns by individuals attempting to exploit immigration loopholes,” said ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Executive Associate Director Derek Benner. “Second, to identify and stop the criminal organizations that are generating false documents and supporting child smuggling.”

From May 6-10, ICE conducted a pilot program intended to determine whether rapid DNA technology can strengthen ICE’s existing investigative processes and potentially rescue more children from dangerous situations.

From the three-day operation, 84 family units who presented indicia of fraud were tested. Of those tested, 18 family units were identified as fraudulent, and the adults involved in the fraud may face criminal charges related to: identity and benefit fraud, alien smuggling, human trafficking and child exploitation.

“It is clear on-site DNA testing has a strong deterrent effect, as HSI agents witnessed multiple instances of individuals confessing to faux families prior to being tested as well,” Benner stated.

Based on the initial proof of concept, ICE’s current order against the awarded contract supports a 120-day extension of the pilot program and expansion to five additional locations along the southwest border

to assess long-term implementation, starting late June.

ICE continues to take a multi-pronged approach to combat fraud by those claiming to be family units and rely on a myriad of data inputs to determine whether a group presenting as a family unit presents with indicia of fraud, based on intelligence gathering, interviews, documentary evidence, or other law enforcement observations.

Between mid-April and June 14, ICE has identified approximately 275 fraudulent families, uncovered 735 fraudulent documents or claims, and presented 553 individuals for prosecution to the Department of Justice.

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Last Reviewed/Updated: 06/20/2019